

# RETHINKING Rural Health▲



## Ensure that individuals who live in rural America have access to high quality, affordable healthcare through new and creative ideas such as Telehealth.

- CMS has taken measurable steps through expanding availability of telecommunications-based services, changing program requirements to achieve lower costs for drugs and promoting flexibility in care delivery, to provide patients in rural communities with access to quality, more affordable health care.
- In 2018, CMS released the agency's first Rural Health Strategy intended to provide a proactive, but preliminary step in our efforts to unleash innovation that will promote access to high quality, affordable healthcare in rural America that achieves results.
- By applying a rural lens to CMS policies, we are removing barriers to care in rural areas and avoiding unintended consequences of policy and program implementation that focuses on urban and suburban areas.

## Our actions have delivered results

- CMS has expanded the availability of telecommunications-based services in unprecedented ways.
  - Starting in 2019, Medicare now pays for virtual check-ins that allow a patient to check in with their clinician by phone or other telecommunication system, and remote evaluations of recorded videos or images that a patient submits to their clinician, to help them decide together whether the patient needs to make a trip to be seen in-person. We also cover stand-alone telephone consultations with clinicians at Rural Health Clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers, expanding access to care for patients in rural areas.
  - We are providing more flexibility to Medicare Advantage plans to offer innovative telehealth services as part of their basic benefit beginning in 2020, expanding access to care for our beneficiaries.
  - We have expanded access to telehealth in our new payment models – including in our recent overhaul of the Medicare Shared Savings Program for accountable care organizations (ACOs).
- In 2019, CMS proposed changes to address Medicare payment disparities that result from the wage index, an adjustment to hospital payments to account for differences in local labor cost. CMS is proposing to increase the wage index of rural and other low wage index hospitals, which can begin to bring payments to rural and other low wage index hospitals closer to urban neighbors, allowing these hospitals to improve quality, attract more talent, and improve patient access.
- CMS is creating more ways for rural areas to transform care delivery by offering new innovative payment models that provide the flexibility needed to tailor integrated care systems to the unique needs of rural Americans.